

JUN 15 1961

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Trujillo Heirs Pin Hopes on Reforms

Ciudad Trujillo, June 15. — In speaking of the late President Luis Somoza of Nicaragua, President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "of course he's an S.O.B., but he's our S.O.B."

Until the last few years the same attitude prevailed toward El Jefe—the recently turned-off dictator of the Dominican Republic. He

was a steadfast friend of the United States. He also was a despot who used his iron rule to combat this lush island's squalor, poverty, disease and illiteracy and to enrich himself and his family while doing so.

Even if the atrocity stories are discounted heavily, Generalissimo

Richard Starnes Trujillo used methods of persuading his enemies that would have brought sick murmurs of admiration from Torquemada, the Inquisitor-General of Spain. Trujillo's successors to power here tacitly admit as much, and have pledged themselves to reforms.

Their latter-day virtue has two prime motives. They cannot continue in power (indeed, the Dominican Republic cannot endure as an independent nation) without a rapprochement with the Organization of American States (OAS) and particularly the United States.

OAS sanctions which are in force at this time are limited, but they're an ominous portent nevertheless. Ciudad Trujillo isn't a ghost town yet, but signs of economic stagnation are beginning to appear. For example, this city boasts some of the finest resort hotels in the Caribbean—and all are either closed or nearly empty.

But there's clearly another reason for the newfound rectitude of El Jefe's heirs. They know the old regime is passe; that it cannot survive the winds of change that are sweeping Latin America.

Whatever his private desires—and mind-reading

is still an imperfect science—young Trujillo knows that all the king's horses cannot reassemble the one-man rule fashioned by his late father. He, and the young men around him, seem convinced they now must do for this island the one thing El Jefe couldn't do—bring it human dignity and personal liberty.

The biggest surprise since the assassination of the generalissimo has been the emergence of young Trujillo and his contemporaries as forces to be reckoned with in something other than the terms applied to the old regime.

Young Trujillo has moved with swift skill and, in fairness, it should be said, considerable personal courage since his father's death. When he stepped out of the chartered airplane that brought him from Europe to Ciudad Trujillo, Raphael Trujillo Jr. knew there was a reasonably good chance he would be met with a burst of machine-gum fire.

Took Command

He was met instead by a stunned population and a power vacuum. He promptly set about confirming the confidence of the people and filling the vacuum, and if he has made a foothold above ground since his arrival it has escaped the notice of the numbers of foreign journalists here.

He has cooperated with the OAS mission. He has opened the country to the largely hostile foreign press. He has even endured visitations of a number of "books"—CIA agents who now are contemptuously referred to as men from the "Cuban Invasion Agency."

He's Somebody

He has deftly frustrated the United States' bumbling attempts to oust him and his family from power, at least for the present, and he has re-educated Washington in the ancient prize-ring maxim, "You can't beat somebody with nobody."

The United States virtuously and foolishly invited the Trujillo dynasty to step down without having the faintest notion who or what would replace it. After three decades of feudal rule, the Dominican Republic has no tradition of democracy. The only tradition it has is Trujillo, and the old man is dead.

The only choice now apparent to the United States and the other American states is some sort of gradual transition under young Trujillo and President Joaquin Balaguer—or chaos and Castroism.

Outsmarted Us

The United States still can have chaos here if that is what it really wants, or it can settle for the only other alternative that seems available.

So far young Trujillo has outsmarted the United States, which has not been very difficult to do, but if he means what he says about free elections and all the rest, it may turn out to be a blessing in disguise.